North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook

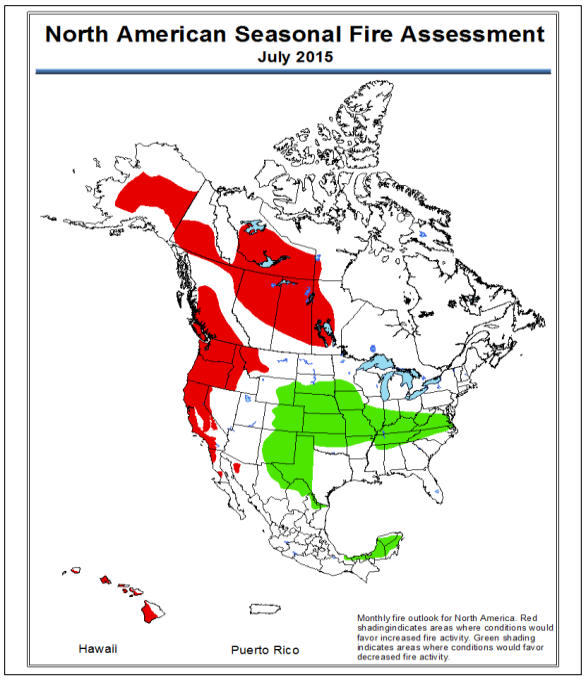
National Interagency Fire Center ● Natural Resources Canada ● Servicio Meteorológico Nacional
United States **Canada** **Mexico**

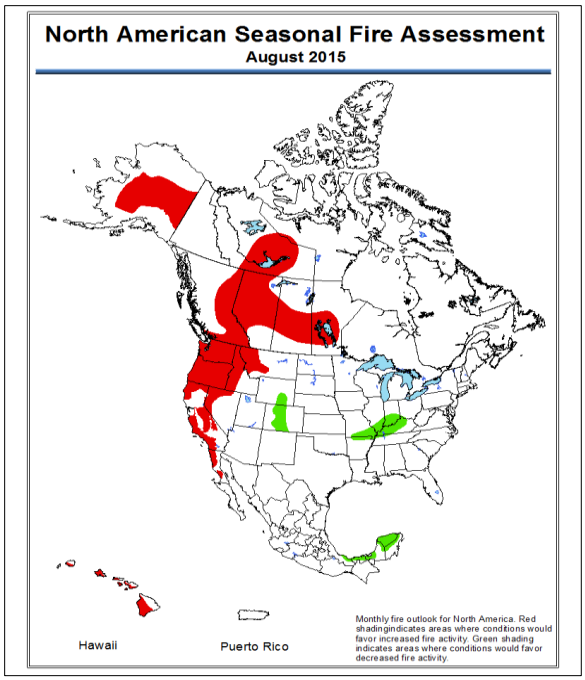
Outlook Period – July and August 2015
Issued on 7 July 2015

Executive Summary

The seasonal fire outlook for July suggests that conditions are favorable for an increase in wildland fire activity across western Canada including much of the Yukon and Northwest Territories; southwestern and part of northern British Columbia; northern Alberta; most of Saskatchewan; and western Manitoba. In the United States, conditions are favorable for an increase in wildland fire activity across the eastern and central Interior of Alaska; all of Washington, all of Oregon; northern and western Idaho; most of western Montana; most of northern California; and coastal mountains and the Sierras of southern California. Conditions are favorable for a decrease in wildland fire activity across the central and southern Rockies; most of the Great Plains; the Upper Mississippi Valley; and most of the Ohio and Tennessee Valleys. .

The seasonal fire outlook for August suggests conditions are favorable for an increase in wildland fire activity in Canada over the central Northwest Territories; eastern British Columbia; most of Alberta; central Saskatchewan; and central Manitoba. In the United States, conditions are favorable for an increase in wildland fire activity over Oregon; Washington; northern and western Idaho; most of western Montana; and the coastal mountains and the Sierras of California. Conditions are favorable for a decrease in wildland fire activity in the central Rockies and part of the Ohio and Mid-Mississippi Valleys.





Monthly fire outlook for North America for July (left) and August (right). Red shading indicates areas where conditions would favor increased fire activity. Green shading indicates areas where conditions would favor decreased fire activity.

Critical Factors

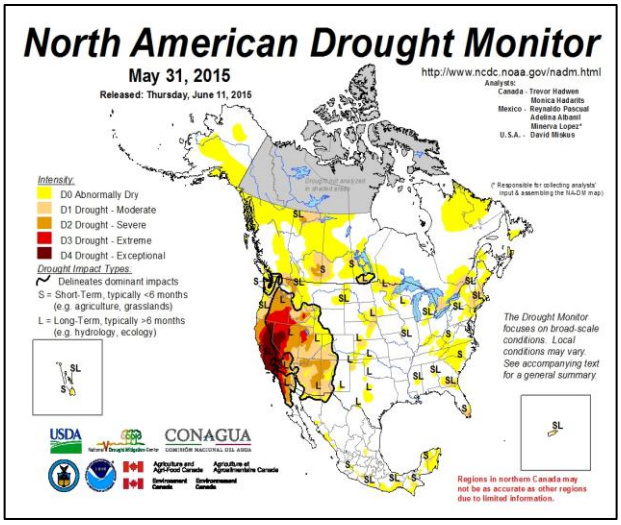
The critical factors influencing significant fire potential for this outlook period are:

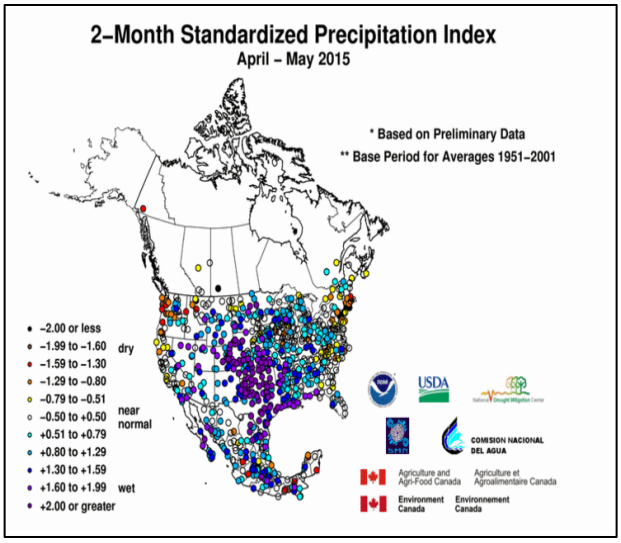
Drought: The North American Drought Monitor from 31 May 2015 (top right) shows severe to exceptional drought over most of the western U.S. with the worst conditions in California, western Nevada, southern Oregon, and parts of northern Baja California. Pockets of moderate to severe drought were over the northern and southern ends of Alberta; and scattered throughout the Great Lakes region the New England states.

Fuels: An early snow melt and general lack of spring precipitation resulted in dry forest conditions throughout western Canada. Fuels were dry across much of the northwestern quarter of the U.S., especially over Washington, northern Idaho and northwestern Montana. Conditions should continue worsen as the average peak of the fire season approaches. Very dry conditions remain over the Interior of Alaska. Precipitation in the southwestern U.S. and much of the Rockies in June mitigated much of the fire threat.

Fire Season Onset: Fire season was well underway in the northwest and the northern prairies of Canada where hot and dry conditions exist. Interior Alaska was also very warm and dry with an active June. Hot and dry conditions in June supported significant fire activity over the Northwest while monsoon rains in the Southwest continued the wet pattern that curtailed fire activity through the early summer.

El Niño-Southern Oscillation: El Niño conditions (warming of the equatorial Pacific Ocean) are forecast to continue strengthening into the fall. This will have significant effects on how the fire season progresses across North America, including hot and dry conditions in western Canada.





Top: North American Drought Monitor from 30 April 2015. **Bottom:** 2-month Standardized Precipitation Index for March-April 2015. (Both *from U.S National Centers for Environmental Information, NCEI/NOAA)*

Canada Discussion

July: A low pressure system that crossed the 60th parallel in early July reduced the fire danger but conditions are expected to rebound by mid-month. Southern British Columbia, northern Alberta and southern Northwest Territories will likely not receive significant precipitation through mid-July, keeping the fire danger high. Persistent and deep dry conditions could result in large campaign fires. There is a low likelihood of wind events in British Columbia and Yukon, preventing any sudden growth of fires in the region.

Towards the end of the month, British Columbia will likely become the primary area of concern while the situation may settle down for Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Rain in the foothills of the Rockies in Alberta and western Northwest Territories could lower these regions to fire season ending conditions.

Eastern Canada will likely remain in low fire danger conditions.

August: Well above-average temperatures will continue to dominate British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan while below-average precipitation conditions persist in the southern Prairies. The combination will maintain high fire danger conditions in central Alberta and Saskatchewan. British Columbia will likely see above average temperatures keeping the fire danger high. Dry conditions in the Northwest Territories will likely persist while weather conditions return to normal.

The foothills of the Rockies in Alberta and Northwest Territories will not likely recover to high fire danger levels.

Eastern Canada will likely remain in low fire danger conditions.

United States Discussion

July: Very wet conditions continued across much of the Southwest and the southern and central Rockies, keeping fire activity relative light. High heat associated with a strong ridge of high pressure over the Pacific Northwest allowed fuels, already dry from below normal winter and spring precipitation, to dry even further. Some precipitation in California and Nevada had little effect on long term drought conditions but briefly reduced the fire threat. Unusually hot and dry conditions over the Alaska Interior fed significant fire activity.

Hot and dry conditions will remain over the Pacific Northwest and the far Northern Rockies where fuels condition is near or above record levels for the month. Thunderstorm activity typically increases in July as the Western ridge occasionally breaks down. The threat of ignitions is high. Late summer rains will continue across the Southwest, the Great Basin, and the southern and central Rockies where fuels remain very moist and green, keeping fire activity suppressed through the month. A stormy, mild and wet pattern east of the Rockies will also curtail fire activity across the eastern two-thirds of the nation. Alaska is expected to remain warm and dry in the Interior with existing fires continuing through the month. New ignitions are possible but typically decrease this time of year.

August: Fire potential will remain high across the Pacific Northwest and the far Northern Rockies as August marks the typical peak to the Western fire season. Drought and typical summer conditions will keep the threat of fires elevated across parts of California. Much of the interior West will remain wet from an active monsoon season. The generally wet pattern will continue in the eastern two-thirds of the nation.

Mexico Discussion

July: El Niño conditions have increased precipitation across Mexico, leading to a significant decrease in wildfire activity across the country. This is particularly true across the Yucatan peninsula, Tabasco, northern Tamaulipas, Nuevo León and Coahuila. Continued dryness in northern Baja California will increase the potential for wildfires.

August: Forecast precipitation and temperature trends in August suggest a continuation of elevated wildfire activity over northern parts of Baja California. Much of the Yucatan peninsula will see a decrease in wildfire activity.

Additional Information

Additional and supplemental information for this outlook can be obtained at:

United States:
National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook
http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/outlooks/monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf

Canada:
Canadian Wildland Fire Information System
http://cwfis.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/home

Mexico:
Servicio Meteorológico Nacional
http://smn.cna.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=156&Itemid=113

Outlook Objective

The North American Seasonal Fire Assessment and Outlook is a general discussion of conditions that will affect the occurrence of wildland fires across Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Wildland fire is a natural part of many ecosystems across North America. This document provides a broad assessment of those factors that will contribute to an increase or decrease of seasonal fire activity. The objective is to assist wildland fire managers prepare for the potential variations in a typical fire season. It is not intended as a prediction of where and when wildland fires will occur nor is it intended to suggest any area is safe from the hazards of wildfire.

Acknowledgements

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